

VZCZCXYZ0011
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDM #2379/01 1431009
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 231009Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9128
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 5972
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 3834
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2348
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7040
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1011
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4413
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 0636
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 6777

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 002379

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/EU, Syria/Iran,
US/Syria, Beirut-Damascus Declaration, Lebanon/Resolution 1680,
Iraq (5/19-21)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers reported a Syrian Foreign Ministry response to a May 19 European Presidency statement expressing EU concern about what it called the recent widespread harassment of human rights defenders in Syria. The EU Presidency urged Syria to review the cases of political prisoners, and immediately release all "prisoners of conscience". It expressed its deep concern about the recent widespread harassment of human rights defenders, their families and peaceful political activists, in particular arbitrary arrests and repeated incommunicado detention. The Syrian Foreign Ministry source said the EU statement is an improper interference in Syrian domestic affairs because the issues it covers fall within the national sovereignty of states and their mission of protecting the interests of their peoples and applying their legal systems. The source said: "States that have allowed secret prisons to fly in their skies and land in their airports and have agreed to build secret prisons on their territory in clear violation of the most

SIPDIS

fundamental principles of human rights and relevant international agreements cannot claim to be defenders of human rights or use this excuse to meddle in the internal affairs of other countries." The source added: "Countries which have imposed a siege to starve the Palestinian people and foil their free choice do not have the moral right to claim that they champion human rights and democracy." The statement concluded by saying: "The government of the Syrian Arab Republic is highly surprised by the statement of the European Presidency, and it calls on it to stop these bald attempts to interfere in Syrian domestic affairs."

Papers also reported President Asad's and Vice President Shara's meetings with Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki, who conveyed a message from Iranian President Ahmadinezhad on the latest regional and international developments. Talks dealt with the latest Iraqi and Palestinian developments, and with Iran's nuclear file. Mottaki briefed Syrian officials on the results of his tour of a number of countries in the region. The Syrian President said that it is the legitimate right of all countries,

including the Islamic Republic of Iran, to benefit from nuclear energy. The Syrian President criticized UN resolution 1680 as a blow to the national sovereignty of two independent countries, forcing them to set up political relations and demarcation of a frontier line. On Iraqi developments, the Syrian president said, "We back and welcome the political process for formation of a new Iraqi government, and Syria is keen on expansion of full relations with Iraq."

The Syrian News Agency (SANA) quoted a source at the Ministry of Education as saying that the Ministry "holds the American School in Damascus responsible for the death of a Syrian school girl during a trip to the Syrian Desert, saying the accident that took her life was due to the absence of needed safety measures." Sources at the Ministry of Education said the American School was not authorized under the Private Education Law and that it is breaking the law by admitting Syrian students. The school did not get permission for this trip in the first place, the source added. "The School's Administration is fully responsible for the students' safety," the sources said. The mourning father told SANA that "the school should be closed." Ahmad al-Samman said the school was responsible for his daughter's death and accused it of negligence, the official agency reported. In a very unusual precedent, Tishreen, the only Syrian daily that is issued on Saturday, covered the story on the first page, with a photo of the child.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Official source at the Foreign Ministry criticizes the European Union Presidency statement as an improper intervention in Syria's internal affairs. The source adds: The Syrian government is astonished at the statement's content and urges the EU Presidency to stop such blatant attempts to interfere in Syria's affairs" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/21)

"President Asad receives a message from Iranian President Ahmadinejad on latest regional and international developments. President Asad reviews with Mottaki the situations in Iraq and Palestine, and means of resisting pressure. Mottaki: UNSC Resolution 1680 violates international law. FM Mouallem: Priority is for national sovereignty and our people's interests" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/19)

"Nour al-Samman, a student at the American School in Damascus, is killed in an accident that was caused by lack of safety measures. The American School in Damascus is not authorized under law of private education to accept Syrian students. The school did not get approval from the ministry for the trip to Palmyra. The Minister of Education and the student's father hold the American School responsible for the child's death" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/20)

"Extensive denunciations of UNSC Resolution 1680: Violation of the UN charter and rude intervention in relations between the two sister countries" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/20)

"Extensive Lebanese denunciation of UNSC resolution 1680, which is depicted as a risky turning point in the life of Lebanon and relations with Syria. Russia says UNSC Resolution 1680 is not consistent with the content of Annan's report" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/19)

"The Iraqi National Unity Government formed by Iraqi Premier Nouri al-Malki obtains the Iraqi Parliament's confidence. Scores of Iraqis killed or wounded during attacks in Baghdad, Mosul, al-Qaem and al-Basra" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/21)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Between May 1983 and May 2006"

Muhammad al-Khadr, a commentator in government-owned Al-Ba'th, wrote (5/19): "In May 1983, the Lebanese government signed a short-lived agreement with Israel.... This May, the ruling parliamentary majority in Lebanon is calling for the establishment of diplomatic relations between Beirut and Damascus, claiming that this is necessary for Lebanon's sovereignty and independence. But this majority does not see the Israeli occupation of Shab'a Farms and Israel's daily violation of Lebanon's land, sea, and airspace as an encroachment on Lebanese sovereignty...."

"What is happening in Lebanon today and what is being planned is bigger than these people. But the problem is not here. The problem and the danger lie in leaving this Arab country as a pawn in the American plan, which, under the pretext of protecting Lebanon, seeks to separate it from its Arab body, just as the agreement of surrender [of 17 May 1983] sought to do, and to apply pressure on Syria. In the past few months we have seen many small details jumping to the top of the agendas of the US State Department and the French Foreign Ministry, and indeed the UN Security Council. In this sense one can understand Security Council Resolution 1680...."

"What a Proclamation!"

Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (5/19): "The Beirut-Damascus Declaration is a product of the Lebanese who say that Israel is not an enemy of Lebanon...."

"It is insane to blame Syria for the current situation in

Lebanon at a time when everyone knows that the parties who are tampering with Lebanon are Israelis, through Americans, and a group of Lebanese who hate Syria and say that it, not Israel, is the enemy....

"The declaration ignores Syria's support for Lebanon and the fact that Syria has withdrawn from Lebanon completely.... The declaration coincided with pressure on Syria through the Security Council...."

"Bush- Olmert"

Ahmad Hamadah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (5/19): "The US Administration is expected to applaud Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's Convergence Plan when he visits Washington next week. The United States will portray the plan as a step toward peace and a painful Israeli concession for which the Palestinians must thank the Israeli government...."

"The US Administration is not concerned about Israel's withdrawal to the June 4, 1967, border and the return of Palestinian refugees to their land and homes, or about the creation of the independent Palestinian state. It is only concerned with one thing: opening its doors and heart to Olmert and providing maximum support for his government program without any regard for international legitimacy...."

Seche